



ADOT Environmental Planning Group

A n n u a l R e p o r t F Y 2006

November 2006





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Mission Statement and Overview

The Environmental Planning Group (EPG) provides environmental services for transportation activities through compliance with regulatory requirements, providing the highest level of professional technical support and education to our agency and customers, while building cooperative relationships with other government agencies and the public.

EPG includes two sections, Technical and Planning, comprised of 40 staff members located in three locations: Phoenix, Tucson and Flagstaff. The Planning and Technical sections assure that all ADOT construction projects comply with environmental law, and help protect sensitive environmental areas within the state. The Group has also assumed responsibility for certain additional environmental issues within ADOT, and provides technical assistance, education, and expert advice on numerous environmental matters. The functions performed in and by the Planning and Technical Sections of the group are, for the most part, mandated by either state or federal law. ADOT EPG maintains a website www.adotenvironmental.com, which provides not only guidance to ADOT environmental partners, but also presents information about the group for the general public.

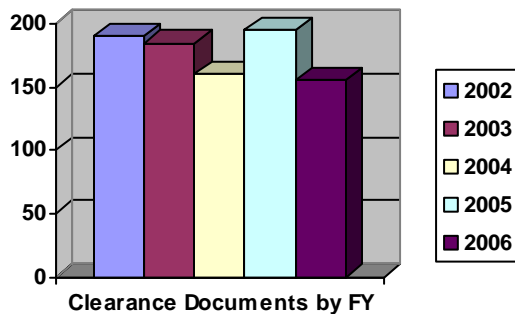
At the present time, EPG maintains in-house expertise in air quality, archaeology, biology, environmental planning, noise, and hazardous materials. EPG also utilizes on-call consultant expertise during the preparation of requisite environmental analysis and documentation.



Summary

This report presents a brief summary of EPG's FY 2006 accomplishments in its many areas of responsibility: NEPA Plan Review, Public Participation, Air and Noise Management, Hazardous Materials, Biology, and Historic Preservation. EPG consistently strives to improve its operations by providing improved service, lower costs, and greater effectiveness. EPG programs continue to achieve recognition for their quality and innovation in competitive professional venues.

The Group uses a variety of methods to continuously monitor its performance and improve its value to the ADOT organization. One measure of this work is the number of environmental clearances actually issued within a fiscal year. This number is highly dependent on the number and type of projects put forward by ADOT; however, EPG products consistently meet or precede project deadlines. In FY 2006, EPG provided environmental clearances for 155 projects and was actively managing environmental clearances for between 300-350 projects at any given time during the course of the year.



This report presents accomplishments in the following categories:

Environmental Planning

NEPA Development

Environmental Technical

Air and Noise Management

Hazardous Materials

Historic Preservation

Biology

Local Government/Transportation Enhancement

Process Improvement

Conclusion



Environmental Planning

NEPA Development

EPG's Environmental Planning Section (EPS) manages and produces the hundreds of environmental documents required by ADOT's construction efforts on an annual basis. These documents insure that all relevant environmental factors are appropriately analyzed, addressed and mitigated. The EPS staff must all maintain a broad background in multiple environmental and public concerns. In particular, the planners must understand the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and all of the various laws, regulations and policies that it encompasses in order to ensure that ADOT construction projects are in compliance.

Although, as previously noted, staff was actively working on 300+ projects during the course of the fiscal year, consisting of a full range of project types from traffic signal installations to pavement preservation to new freeway construction, summaries are provided for several particularly noteworthy efforts.

State Route 85

The SR 85 corridor is a 34-mile stretch of two-lane state highway that connects I-8 and I-10. The highway is used as a bypass around the Phoenix metropolitan area and carries a higher percentage of tractor-trailer rigs than other two-lane state highways. Construction to widen the highway to four lanes is underway with approximately 22 miles widened or currently under construction. To ensure that implementation of roadway improvements meets the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act and associated rules, policies, and regulations, EPG has provided environmental oversight and management through the completion of an Environmental Assessment (2002), several Environmental Re-evaluations, and detailed mitigation plans. EPG is a mainstay for the corridor team—its active involvement over seven years ensures continual and seamless project information while promoting the Department's environmental stewardship goal.

US 93

US 93, from Wickenburg to the Nevada border at Hoover Dam has been formally designated as a CANAMEX route, which provides a priority route for commercial traffic between Canada and Mexico. ADOT has been pursuing an accelerated schedule to complete improvements to this route, which still included approximately 125 miles of two-lane roadway in 1997, when an Environmental Assessment was approved for reconstructing a 39-mile segment of the most accident-prone section of the highway. The last seven miles of this section are currently under construction under the Cottonwood Canyon and Bridle Creek contract. This project has received the 2006 Arizona Transportation Partnering Excellence Award for projects over 10 million dollars.

Although the remaining highway segments have higher design speeds than the first segment, as traffic has increased, they have become more congested. It is also

anticipated that the new bridge at Hoover Dam will ease the existing bottleneck associated with crossing the dam and further increase the volume of traffic on US 93 between Nevada and Phoenix.

Design has begun on the last remaining segment of two-lane roadway between the Nevada border and Kingman, AZ. One project is currently under construction (Antelope Wash to Old US 93) and two more are being prepared for advertisement (McGary's Wash and Tompkins Canyon) in the 32-mile segment of US 93 between Wikiup and I-40. Similarly, the Wickenburg Interim Bypass project – which will remove an existing traffic bottleneck in downtown Wickenburg – is currently being prepared for advertisement.



Burro Creek Bridge

Loop 303 Estrella Freeway

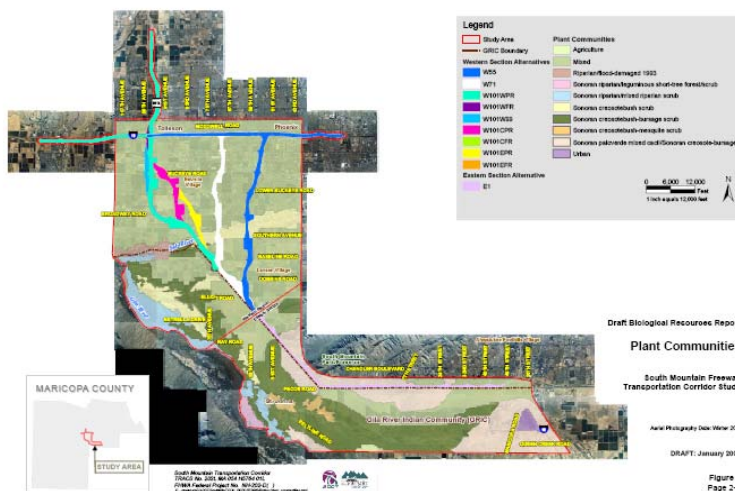
The Loop 303 Estrella Parkway is an important component of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP is a blueprint for the Phoenix metropolitan area (Valley) transportation improvements for the next 20 years. Plans call for Loop 303 to stretch more than 40 miles through the West and North Valley. Loop 303 extends from the proposed SR 801 just south of I-10 in Goodyear to the proposed Lone Mountain TI two miles south of the SR 74 Carefree Highway on the I-17 Black Canyon Freeway.

Currently, Loop 303 operates as a two-lane roadway from I-10 to Grand Avenue (U.S. 60), with the exception of a four-lane divided section between McDowell and Indian School roads, and a four-lane divided highway from U.S. 60 to Happy Valley Parkway. The proposed plan for Loop 303 includes the construction of three lanes in each direction between I-10 and I-17 within the next 10 years. The first in a series of construction phases is expected to begin in 2008.

These studies are the first step in developing the Loop 303 corridor as a new regional freeway link in the northwest Valley. The draft state and draft federal environmental assessments are being rewritten for the northern section of Loop 303 to incorporate public comments. Once they are in a final format, they will be submitted to the Federal Highway Administration for review.

Loop 202 (South Mountain Freeway)

Another important corridor on the RTP, a proposed new freeway to provide regional system integration by connecting Interstate 10 west of Phoenix and south of Phoenix, is currently following the federal National Environmental Policy Act process in the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As part of the NEPA process, EPG staff was involved in the preparation and review of numerous studies and analyses related to potential impacts from a new roadway to the physical and socioeconomic environment. An integral component of this process involved EPG planners in numerous stakeholder meetings such as the South Mountain Community Advisory Team, a volunteer committee comprised of community members. A draft EIS has been circulated for ADOT comment and a draft EIS is anticipated to be made available to the public for comments in the spring of 2007.



South Mountain Freeway Corridor

US Route 89, Antelope Hills - Junction US 160

US 89 is the primary north-south route between I-40 in Flagstaff to the Utah border. This route serves as the principal access route to a number of tourist attractions north of Flagstaff (Sunset Crater National Monument, Wupatki National Monument), the Navajo Nation, and Lake Powell. August 2006 marks the date when EPG completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for roadway improvements between milepost 442 and 484. The EA took several years to complete as a result of many complex issues related to cultural resources on the Navajo Nation, and design concepts within Wupatki National Monument, Gray Mountain, and Cameron. Projects identified through this process will now be proposed for inclusion in future ADOT programming cycles.

State Route 179, Village of Oak Creek to Sedona

SR 179 is a 14.5-mile long route that connects I-17 with SR 89A in central Arizona. Traffic conditions between the Village of Oak Creek and Sedona have been a concern to the residents, business people and governments in the Sedona area since the 1980's. This is reflected in two planning documents that were approved and adopted by the City of Sedona in 1991. In 1992, ADOT completed a design concept report and environmental overview for SR 179, and completed a final environmental assessment in January 2003. The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) stated that design would be completed in accordance with a Needs-Based Implementation Plan (NBIP). The NBIP consisted of a comprehensive public involvement plan that incorporated the needs of the public in much more detail than the original preferred alternative. During design a reevaluation of the original EA was completed and the necessary permits were acquired. The outcome of the NBIP and subsequent design was built on consensus, which allowed this project to move forward. Corridor reconstruction is being completed in two projects, the first of which has started from the Village of Oak Creek to the Coconino National Forest boundary. The second project - Forest Boundary to Sedona - has a planned bid advertisement in spring 2007.



State Route 179, Village of Oak Creek to Sedona

Environmental Technical

The Environmental Technical Section (ETS) contains EPG expertise in air, noise, hazardous materials, biology and historic preservation. The Local Government/Transportation Enhancement Team is a recent addition to the Section, providing support to local governments and enhancement project sponsors as they navigate the federal aid process. The following provides a summary of the FY 2006 accomplishments of the ETS technical teams.

Air and Noise Management

In addition to their work developing and managing air and noise analysis for environmental compliance, the Air/Noise Team participated in a number of efforts involving stakeholders in support of both the ADOT environmental and design processes. The Team attended approximately 50 public meetings for various projects, ranging from formal public meetings and hearings, neighborhood meetings, and multi-agency meetings, including 3 with the largest attendance for any project in ADOT history - those conducted to provide information regarding the proposed South Mountain Freeway.

The Air/Noise Team participated in research activities throughout the year, including a field research study on SR 260 to analyze noise impacts on wildlife movements in order to improve the designs of existing and future wildlife crossings, and involvement in a partnership between ADOT, FHWA and others in continuing the implementation and evaluation of ADOT's Quiet Pavement Pilot Program (QPPP), which was initiated in August of 2003.



Quiet Pavement on SR 51

The Air/Noise Team attended a number of professional conferences and presentations throughout the fiscal year. One team member participated in an air quality conference/discussion for state DOTs held in Denver, which focused on the future changes in document preparation for air quality reports. An Air/Noise Team representative provided 5 pavement presentations in 5 consecutive days on rubberized surfaces and noise at the University of Sonora in Hermosillo, Mexico, at the request of ADOT Director. The Team also hosted a reciprocal visit to Arizona by students from this same university. Team members also made presentations on ADOT's QPPP at two national conferences: the FHWA Tire/Pavement Noise Strategic Planning Workshop at Purdue University, and the Noise and Vibration Conference in Seattle.

The emerging issue of Mobile Source Air Toxics analysis has become a major focus area for the Team and an integral component of the environmental documentation for the South Mountain Freeway Project. In an effort to increase knowledge regarding the latest information on the topic, the Air/Noise Team sponsored FHWA air quality workshops in Phoenix on Mobile Source Air Toxics and air quality modeling. In a similar effort to increase understanding of air quality issues, a workshop on air quality conformity was sponsored, and was attended by representatives from government agencies throughout the State.

Hazardous Materials

EPG's Hazardous Materials Team responded to over 150 requests for hazardous materials clearances and provided oversight for hazardous materials testing and removal on ADOT right of way (ROW). One project related to the widening of U.S. 93 required the closure of 19 wells and removal of several types of hazardous materials from newly-acquired right of way.



US 93 Well Abandonment

In addition to their regular requirements to provide professional support for hazardous materials in ADOT ROW, the Team also maintained a high profile in assisting ADOT with a variety of technical issues. Staff worked closely with the ADOT Right of Way Group and Attorney General's Office to address issues related to contaminants found in parcels acquired for highway construction, or resulting from large spills and overflows.



ADOT Right of Way Disposal Property

The Team has experienced changes with the addition of both new staff and new duties. New staff underwent intensive training in both OSHA/EPA-mandated classes and in fieldwork throughout the State and region. EPG is once again preparing the environmental clearances for ROW disposals and materials sources in-house, assigning these duties to hazardous materials staff.

The Hazardous Materials Team, in conjunction with the State Engineer's office and the newly created Office of Environmental Services, completed a 13-month clean up of an ADOT maintenance facility in the eastern part of the state.

Historic Preservation

Over 30 federal and State laws apply to the treatment of historic properties. The EPG Historic Preservation Team (HPT) ensures ADOT Development projects are in compliance with these laws. Several notable activities the HPT was engaged in during FY 2006 include the following:

Archaeological field activities along US 60 were completed. The sites excavated for this project show promise in providing new and exciting information about prehistoric life in

central Arizona. Though the analysis of materials is expected to take several more years, the preliminary results have already been used to present groundbreaking research in the study of prehistoric agricultural systems.



US 60 Archaeological Excavations

HPT Worked closely with the Gila River Indian Community to identify culturally significant properties in the proposed South Mountain Freeway study area. The area around and including South Mountain has been culturally significant for thousands of years and HPT worked diligently to consult with interested parties to develop an approach to ensure proper treatment of historic properties.

Proposed improvements to the Apache Trail and the Coronado Trail have led HPT to begin the process of developing a programmatic approach to the treatment of the historic characteristics of these roads. While this process is still in the early stages, it promises to clarify and streamline the historic preservation process required for evaluating and treating the roads and provide an effective management tool for continued treatment of historic trails throughout the state.

HPT was involved in the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between FHWA and the USDA Forest Service regarding federally funded road projects within Forest lands in Arizona. The MOU provides an outline for timely review and clarifies the processes for escalation.

New this fiscal year, a member of HPT attended several Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) and Council of Governments (COG) kick-off meetings for Round 14 Transportation Enhancement project applications. This provided an opportunity for HPT to clarify the historic preservation process required for enhancement project



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environmental reviews, and to answer questions from the local governments regarding planning for these requirements.

Biology

The EPG Biology Team is responsible for review and coordination related to Threatened and Endangered Species, Sensitive Species (both federal and Tribal), Arizona Species of Concern, Invasive Species, Wetland and Riparian areas, as well as a host of other laws, regulations and policies related to biological analysis of ADOT projects. For FY 2006, Biology Team members were involved with the following teams, activities, responses and/or projects:

The Biology Team participated in a number of committees, including the Bighorn Sheep Technical Advisory Committee for SR 68 and SR 93; Gunnison's prairie dog conservation working committee; and, the Sonoran Desert tortoise conservation committee.

The Team was involved in the development of numerous plans, studies and surveys. They prepared a proposal and received funding for a 3-year antelope study on US 89 north of Flagstaff. Results of this study will be used region-wide to determine future necessary conservation efforts. A wildlife accident reduction study and plan for SR 64 north of Williams was prepared and grants received for wildlife accident reduction monitoring for SR 64 to support the plan. And, year 3 of a 5-year survey/monitoring effort was completed for the southwestern willow flycatcher (WIFL) in the Big Sandy River on Highway 93 south of Wikieup.

The Team is currently in the process of working out compliance issues for the migratory bird treaty act (MBTA) on several bridge projects that may impact nesting cliff swallows. The intent is to create an efficient system for MBTA compliance by obtaining an annual "blanket" MBTA permit from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Albuquerque office, setting up some standard mitigation practices and creating a list of wildlife rehabilitation organization contacts to accept eggs and birds when conflicts arise during construction



Cliff Swallow Netting Mitigation

EPG biologists reviewed and/or responded for ADOT to various Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings, de-listings, and critical habitat proposals to the USFWS, providing comments on the proposed listing of the headwater chub and roundtail chub, the de-listing of Arizona Agave and the Bald Eagle, proposed critical habitat and economic analysis for Mexican spotted owl (MSO), WIFL, cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl (CFPO) and holmgren milk-vetch. For the CFPO, the Team responded with an action plan after de-listing. A plan was needed because of the status of the court decision on de-listing and the possibility it might be re-listed. This process includes coordinating with the USFWS and requesting “technical assistance” for their opinion as to the impacts of specific projects to the CFPO. The USFWS responds with a letter, which is kept in the project file. The process also calls for keeping an electronic list of these projects, so in the event that the courts determine that an injunction should be placed on the de-listing, EPG can consult with the electronic list, pull all the technical assistance coordination letters and associated biological analysis, and batch them together into one ESA consultation to the USFWS. This will ensure that ADOT can quickly meet regulatory requirements should the owl be re-listed, while maintaining the current construction schedule.

During bridge construction on US 60 in the Phoenix District, EPG biologists coordinated the successful removal of a great horned owl nest with eggs and the successful removal of a red-tailed hawk nest with eggs through coordination with the USFWS in accordance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Both efforts were completed within a short amount of time, following an innovative, new approach, at little cost.



Great Horned Owl on US 60 Bridge



Great Horned Owl's Eggs Removed from US 60 Bridge

A multi-jurisdictional effort between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), ADOT, and USFWS was also completed to conserve a population of over 200 *Pediocactus bradyi* on SR 89A. This included survey and conservation efforts such as adding boulders to rehabilitate a turnout and removing a pedestrian gate in suitable cactus habitat. Also, a monitoring plan and handout for maintenance and permits personnel that included cactus information and best management practices was created for BLM and ADOT use.



Brady Pincushion Cactus (About 1.5 Inches in Diameter)

EPG, along with the ADOT Natural Resources Management Section, has actively participated on the behalf of ADOT on the Arizona Habitat Connectivity Working Group. The Group is working to create a statewide map showing areas of concern for wildlife connectivity, in conjunction with multiple agencies. The intent of the group is to incorporate the plan and mapping into various state agency management plans to ensure the agencies participating are planning in the same manner. In addition, the long-term goal is to incorporate the connectivity plan into the ADOT Transportation Planning Division and Predesign procedures for project development. To date the Working Group has received the 2006 FHWA Exemplary Ecosystems Award and has been nominated for a 2006 Arizona Quality Alliance Showcase Award.



Pedestrian-Wildlife Underpass Along SR 260 (Norris Dodd)



EPG has completed training videos for the MSO and WIFL, and is in the process of completing a training video for the flat-tailed horned lizard. The intent behind creating the videos is to provide a training tool for ADOT construction and maintenance personnel to utilize when working in sensitive habitats containing these species.

The ADOT Biology Team also provided several presentations throughout the FY. A brown bag session was hosted on the SR 260 wildlife connectivity projects and the Bighorn Sheep studies, with representatives from the Arizona Game and Fish Department providing the presentations. Biology process presentations were given at a separate brown bag session, as well as at the 2005 Natural Resources Management Section training workshops, and to the Roadway Design Group.

Local Government/Transportation Enhancement

The newest members of the Environmental Planning Group, the Local Government/Transportation Enhancement (LG/TE) Team, are dedicated to ensuring that recipients of local government and enhancement funds are in compliance with all of the required environmental regulations necessary to allow FHWA to provide project funding. The intent in integrating environmental project planners into an LG/TE Team under the Technical Section is to improve project knowledge and enhance customer service across local government and enhancement projects.

In a continuing effort to keep communication lines open and improve review times for environmental documents, EPG instituted an agreement on review and response times for City of Tucson LG/TE environmental projects. The Team meets monthly with the City of Tucson environmental coordinator to discuss city project priorities and resolve outstanding issues. In addition, the Team met with Douglas, Pima County, Scottsdale, Gila County, and the Maricopa County Department of Transportation to discuss the LG/TE NEPA process.



Barrio Anita Transportation Enhancement Project



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The LG/TE Team developed a training module on the project development and environmental process that will be presented around the state to Local Governments, COGs and MPOs starting in January 2007, to provide current information on the NEPA process for local governments requesting federal funds for their projects.

The LG/TE Team will also be instituting a new process to enhance coordination and communication at the onset of the project compliance phase, beginning in the winter of 2006/07. The Team has developed a project data sheet that will identify major project components, key environmental contacts from both the local government and ADOT, and the overall plan of action for compliance, ensuring agreement between the local entity and the ADOT environmental staff. This form will be project specific, and in an effort to reduce paper and expedite the exchange of information, will be processed electronically.

The LG/TE Team also developed a local government contact list, which the Team implemented in October 2006. The intent of the contact list is to establish a mechanism to allow ADOT environmental staff to disseminate information quickly to all local government contacts through an electronic format. This will be useful to quickly and efficiently notify local entities of upcoming training, changes in regulations, and changes in process.



Process Improvement

Significant achievements were completed in FY 2006 which continued the progress of understanding, automating, and streamlining operations, as well as providing information and facilitating communications to better meet customer needs.

Project Tracking System

EPG, in partnership with ADOT's Program and Project Management Section completed the roll out of version 1.2 of a centralized project tracking system (PTS) database which maintains information regarding the number of projects, responsible staff, due dates, concerns and the current status of the project for each specialty (air, water, hazardous materials, etc.). Enhancements to the system include a web application that allows consultant access to the PTS to input schedule information, project manager access to the latest project-related environmental information, and an ad hoc reporting tool that provides a mechanism for users to create customized reporting documents.

Categorical Exclusion Checklist

EPG worked with FHWA to develop a streamlined approach to Categorical Exclusion (CE) documentation for ADOT projects in the form of an environmental checklist. This checklist format was developed a year ago for use in the ADOT/FHWA local government program. The amount of environmental and impact evaluation and mitigation remains the same, but the method of formally documenting it in a CE requires less writing. This improves the delivery schedule as it simplifies the preparation of a CE and shortens the review time, while at the same time providing improved quality assurance. This format is also used for State-funded Environmental Determination documents.



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Project No. _____
TRACS No. _____
Project Name _____

Environmental Impact Summary			
Land Management Agency			
	Present	Not Present	Comment
Tribal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tribal(s): _____
Federal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agency(ies): _____
State	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agency(ies): _____
County	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agency(ies): _____
Local	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agency(ies): _____
Natural Environment			
	Present	Not Present	Comment
Sensitive Biological Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Biology Memo: <input type="checkbox"/> BR <input type="checkbox"/> BE <input type="checkbox"/> (date ADOT approved: _____)
1. Threatened/Endangered Species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Federal Sensitive Species/Habitat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Date federal agency approved: _____
3. Tribal Sensitive Species/Habitat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Date(s) federal agency/Tribal(s) approved: _____
4. AZ Species of Concern/Habitat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5. Native Plants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Date of survey: _____
6. Other Wildlife and Habitat Concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agency commenting and date of comment: _____
Invasive Species	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Wetland Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Riparian Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
100-Year Floodplain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	FEMA FIRIM map number(s): _____ Letter of Map Revision effective date(s): _____ Floodplain not delineated: <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 404 Waters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If Waters impacted, permit type and/or number: _____ Corps file number: _____
Section 401 Water Quality Certification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Certification type: _____
Prime or unique farmland	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	NRCS map: _____
Farmland of statewide or local importance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sole Source Aquifer(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Wild and Scenic Rivers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Navigable Waters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Cultural Resources			
	Present	Not Present	Comment
Archaeological/Historic Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Report(s) and concurrence date(s): _____ Tribal Consultation: _____
Section 4(f)(5)(f) Resources			
	Present	Not Present	Comment
Section 4(f) Wildlife/Waterfowl	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Section 4(f) Historic site	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Section 4(f) Recreational site	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Section 4(f) Park	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Section 5(f) Resource	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

(continued on next page)

Categorical Exclusion Checklist Excerpt

In-Lieu Mitigation

The Corps of Engineers is implementing a new process to improve the way in-lieu mitigation funds are collected and expended. In the past, when an ADOT project has caused permanent impacts to Waters of the United States, the Corp's preference has been that ADOT replace the damaged waters "in-kind and on-site" with mitigation work included within the ADOT contract to improve existing waters or the creation of new waters adjacent to the impact (i.e., within or close to the contract area). However, there are often situations where, due to local site conditions, area suitable for development of functional waters is either limited or non-existent. There have been enough failed attempts to create or improve waters in unsuitable areas that the Corps has launched a new program designed to achieve better mitigation success.



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The Corps now searches for partners with good opportunities for waters improvement / development projects. Then a Memorandum of Agreement describing responsibilities of the partners is completed and a “Standing Proposal” is developed. The Standing Proposal is a project plan that describes what the partner will accomplish on its property with any mitigation funds it receives, the cost per acre it needs to complete the project, etc.

Once the Standing Proposal is approved, when a project will impact Waters of the United States, the Corps includes a stipulation within the Special Conditions of the Individual 404 permit that requires the permit holder to provide the Corps with a check made out to the Partner for use on a specific Standing Proposal. The amount of the check will be reflective of the number of acres impacted by the project requiring mitigation and the cost per acre for the Partner to replace that acreage through the approved Standing Proposal. This process should result in fully functional replacement waters replacing those impacted by projects to meet the national objective of no net loss to the waters.

With pre-approved partners and Standing Proposals, the time currently used to look for potential partners, develop agreements and obtain Corps approval are all avoided. The process should also reduce the time currently used to attempt to develop on-site, in-kind mitigation acreage when there are limited or no opportunities in the area.



Luna Lake Wetland Area

Biology

In the arena of process development, a new scoping process is currently being coordinated with the Arizona Game and Fish Department using their new on-line environmental review tool. This approach will allow EPG biologists to quickly access important biological information early in the NEPA process. EPG biologists have also integrated invasive and noxious weed mitigation into all ADOT projects in an ongoing effort to prevent establishment of future and spread of current weed populations. The



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new process has saved time and money by eliminating the need for project specific weed surveys to be conducted on all projects.

Education and Training

EPG continued to provide education and training within and outside of the Department over the past fiscal year. EPG sponsored monthly Brown Bag sessions, covering a multitude of transportation and environmental issues. The Group continued to hold regularly scheduled coordination meetings with on call environmental consultants. Staff provided presentations as requested to ADOT customers on topics such as NEPA, cultural and biological resources, hazardous materials topics, air quality and noise issues, and Clean Water Act permitting procedures. As noted throughout this report, EPG was also involved in numerous professional conferences and meetings and gave presentations to university students as part of their course curriculum.

A number of workshops and training seminars were hosted by EPG during FY 2006, presented by various agencies and organizations, including FHWA and the National Highway Institute. EPG has also embarked on an effort to create an in-house training library consisting of videos, audio tapes and written materials on various subjects such as *Making Presentations* and *Managing Multiple Priorities*, in an effort to provide staff members with easy access to career development training. Due to the large number of new staff added during fiscal year 2006, a new employee handbook and orientation program was developed and implemented.

EPG Website

Whenever possible, presentations and handout materials are placed on the EPG website to allow continued use of these materials and information. Also included on the website are copies of all the educational videos developed by EPG. The website is constantly updated with the latest regulatory and procedural information, such as the new CE checklist and guidelines. New this year is a site map feature that allows the user to easily find information on any topic, and a *What's New* opening page for the frequent users to quickly identify new additions to the site.

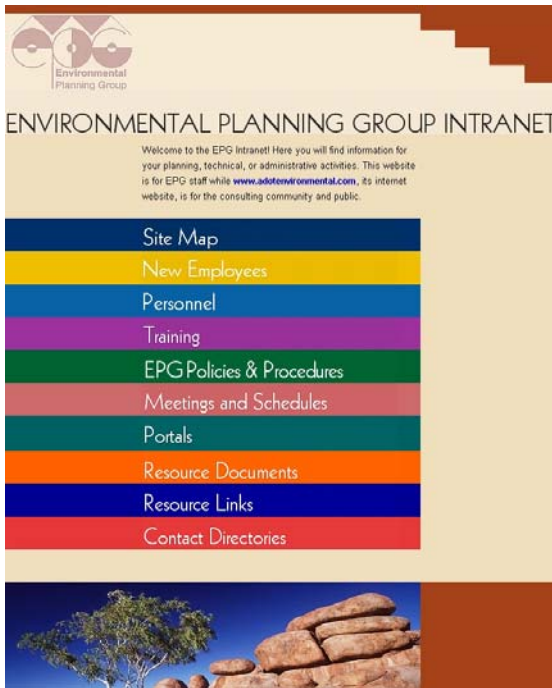
Usage of the website continues to increase substantially. The EPG website traffic increased over 10 percent during FY 2006. During March 2006, the number of page-views was 15,318 compared to 13,141 in July 2005. The monitoring of website traffic has been suspended in April 2006 pending an introduction to new hardware and monitoring software for all of ADOT's websites.

Also new this fiscal year, an EPG Intranet site was created to allow information to be posted for ADOT staff access only. Items such as the new employee handbook and EPG internal policies and procedures, as well as links to important personnel information and ADOT policies are included on this site.



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EPG Intranet Website Homepage (left) and Sample Inside Page



Conclusion

The Environmental Planning Group experienced a great deal of change over fiscal year 2006 as a result of unprecedented staffing and management turn over and transition, and requisite hiring and training of new employees. However, despite these challenges, the Group was able to continue to focus on its core business, providing on time delivery of environmental clearances for the ADOT Development program. In addition, EPG also continued to maintain a solid commitment to quality, customer needs, education, improved efficiency, relationship building, and stewardship, as is evidenced by the summary of accomplishments provided in this report.